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## Editor's Note

The Nick Carter stories strain our credulity, at times; when Nick Carter is bound hand and foot to a chair, in the power of three of his enemies, and craftily manages to unbind himself while they are within a few feet of him, one would like to know how he does it. It is true his adversaries, we are told, were in the midst of a heated discussion, but even so . . . When Nick Carter, pursued by several toughs, is shot at over twelve times, is missed, and escapes, though the shooting occurs within the four walls of a room, the author still continues, himself too driven by incident, perhaps, and the over-brimming life of the plot to say more than that Nick bears a charmed life. By this explanation he does not precisely cover himself with glory. Then the factor of coincidence is abused, in spots; when the detective gets nearer to his clew through the remembrance of a face seen at a theatre, a face he had had no occasion to notice before, the reader protests. Of course, these are extreme instances.

The style is impersonal, swift and direct as the wind; what it cannot move, it touches,—what it can, it drives before it; unhappily—and this is another defect—some of the characters, at dramatic moments, show a tendency to accent their speeches in a second-hand, barely melodramatic fashion. I say “barely” because this weakness has been magnified to incredible proportions, by newspaper men; there is really very little of it. Another defect is a kind of piety, where a lady is concerned, the display of a brand of chivalry, half-demoded, half-puritanic, which somehow seems uncouth and rather laughable in a book, to-day. I can imagine the author slaying Nick with his own hand rather than let him cast a slurring glance on any of his ladies, who, as such, are angelic, but who are too dissimilar and individual, as creations, to be angels; they are alive. There is no corruption of youthful morals here; I am sure these tales could be read before a young ladies’ bible class without a tremor of conscience. Another defect; an overclipping of the long sentence into short ones by the mere wholesale distribution of periods.

Such, then, in the main, are the defects,—but how curiously smothered in good qualities! No single one of these tales should

be taken apart and judged on points as a literary effort. They are parts of a vast volume, covering a vast field, and all sorts and conditions of men appear and disappear through it, for the most part drawn singularly pat to type, with a quick, dexterous hand; but where the author misses he passes on. Out of the crowd of toughs haunting these pages, it is noteworthy that no two act or speak alike; there is always some characteristic, in speech, some detail of past history, a manner of comporting themselves to differentiate each from the rest; no two dress alike, either,—some detail of costume is rapidly sketched in to make each visible. It is the same with the other crooks in their several categories. Here, for example, enters Moses Slavinski (I have chosen almost at random):

"Mr. Van Schaik started from his chair as he heard these words, and he looked toward the doorway, in which a little, shrivelled-up old Jew, with a sharp and very shrewd face, was standing."

"The Jew's hair was long and unkempt. It was gray. An iron-gray beard covered his face. . . . His hands were thin, and his fingers, with their dirty, sharp, untrimmed nails were like talons. He had a soft, insinuating way about him which was unpleasant to behold."

The reader, seated by his fireside, who should follow Nick Carter for an evening would move about amid a kaleidoscopic crowd of crooks, confidence men, footpads, lawyers, doctors, greengoods men, prize fighters, preachers, prostitutes, actors, dope-fiends, "fences," pawnbrokers, bank-presidents, railroad men, army men, laborers, clerks, cabmen, society men, quacks, sometimes afoot, sometimes in a cab or in a train,—mostly in a hurry. The number of strange dives, dens, secret chambers, lawyers' offices, doctors' rooms, queer cafés, bizarre engines and all the labyrinthine intricacies of a big city touched on in these pages is appalling. To label so many men quickly, to describe so many places accurately, often minutely, is surely something of an undertaking; there was need, not merely of ingenuity, but of an almost inexhaustible faculty of invention, a solid faculty, to achieve it. These tales are literature. But what matters is that, though ignored, they also hold an important place in the development of literature in this country. They drew sustenance wholly from this soil, hence their influence is formative. The author ploughed up a wide surface and literary birds fed and are feeding

after him, even down, or up, to the motion picture; I really did not know the author's name until recently, having never seen it in print, but his influence is at work to-day.

In the two extracts inserted below, there is a good chance for dramatic effect. The first is from "The Crisis," by Winston Churchill (page 36):

"Hark! Was that the sing-song voice of the auctioneer? He was selling the cattle. High and low, caressing and menacing, he teased and exhorted them to buy. They were bidding, yes, for the possession of souls, bidding in the currency of the Great Republic. And between the eager shouts came a moan of sheer despair. What was the attendant doing now? He was tearing two of them from a last embrace.

"Three—four were sold while Stephen was in a dream."

The following is from "The Devil Worshippers," a Nick Carter story (page 22):

"What he felt was almost overwhelming, for he was standing with one foot upon the lower step of the very house where the banker, Simon Gray, had lived, and where he had died with the sign of the dagger upon his temple, and where his daughter, Miriam, now resided."

"The house was ablaze with light, almost as if a party were being entertained within it."

Which of these two extracts is dramatic, which melodrama? Which is in the supposedly dime-novel vein? Which is literature?



## The Pursuit of the Lucky Clew

By the author of "Nicholas Carter"

### CHAPTER I

#### A QUAKER CITY PROBLEM

**I**T was eight o'clock Monday morning when Nick Carter arrived at his New York office, after an absence of one week, during which time another police puzzle had been solved by the noted detective. It was eight o'clock, but Chick, his loyal assistant, had